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ABSTRACT

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THE RELIGION OF THE POOR: ESCAPE OR CREATIVE FORCE?

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THE RELIGION OF THE POOR: ESCAPE OR CREATIVE FORCE?

Abstract

This study presents an alternative explanation of low-income religious behavior other than as a compensation for the conditions of lower-class life, or as an escape from those conditions. The argument is made that the religion of the poor contributes in significant and positive ways to the processes of identity formation and to the development and maintenance of cultural values and norms. The immediate social environment of the religious service provides a context in which identities are dynamically and dramatically conferred, developed and reinforced. With regards to the larger social environment, the religion of the poor, first of all, offers a challenge to the hierarchical structure of the general status system. And, secondly, the religion of the poor offers an understanding of tragedy and suffering that is frequently lacking from the sensibilities of the religious nonpoor.

THE RELIGION OF THE POOR: ESCAPE OR CREATIVE FORCE?

This paper is an attempt to correct what is believed to be a one-sided interpretation of the religion of the poor. An alternative explanation of the religious behavior of the poor is offered to challenge the generally accepted theories of social depriviation (Niebuhr, 1929; Pope, 1942; Glock & Stark, 1965; Elinson, 1965), social disorganization (Holt, 1940; Cohn, 1957; Poblete & O'Dea, 1960; Lanternari, 1963), and psychological maladjustment (Cutten, 1927; Boisen, 1939a, 1939b; Alland, 1962; Kaplan, 1965).[1] It is too simplistic to explain the religious patterns of the poor as merely a reaction to the conditions of poverty that the poor daily face. And it is not adequate to emphasize only the negative consequences of religious behavior, or to argue that, for the poor, religion functions primarily as an escape from the oppressive and depressive conditions of poverty, or as a compensation for such conditions.

A major weakness of the deprivation, disorganization, and maladjustment theories is that they tend to understand culture and society in static, ahistorical terms, as basically limiting forces, rather than as dynamic and creative. Also, they tend to see the individual as passive and at the mercy of imposing external conditions. In other words, they present an oversocialized view of man (Wrong, 1961).[2] By overemphasizing the escapist or compensatory functions of religion, the deprivation, disorganization, and maladjustment theories fail to recognize that religion can also be a creative force in its own right.

Karl Marx is often referred to as the major proponent of the idea that religion functions as an escape for the poor. Marx said that religion is the "opium of the people," by which he meant that religion provided an

illusory escape from the troubles of the real world. But even Marx recognized that religion can function as more than an escape, that at times religion is a form of protest against the conditions of oppression in a society.

> Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of an unspiritual situation. It is the opium of the people (Marx & Engels, 1964:42, emphasis theirs).

Marx, however, had very little to say about the protest function of religion. His writings dealt more with the way religion reflects the social order than with the way religion shapes the social order.

In contrast is the scholarship of Max Weber, who wrote extensively about the paradoxical nature of religion. Weber did not deny the partial truth of the escapist interpretation of religion, but he recognized that what is equally true is that religion makes a positive impact on the larger society. According to Weber, religion makes two major positive contributions to social structure and social change. First of all, he argued that there is a charismatic quality to religion, which endows the religious person (usually a leader) with an aura of "extraordinariness" (1947:361). The consequence for the individual believer who experiences or comes into contact with charisma is that he is set relatively free from any specific environment where he finds himself at a particular time. Thus, religion functions as a breakthrough from the ordinary routine. Religion in this sense is innovative and change-producing, and tends to encourage the autonomy of religious faith from secular life.

Secondly, Weber recognized that religion has a positive and potent impact on the secular environment (1958). The religious believer who is serious about his commitment puts all of his activities, sacred and secular, under the control of religiously prescribed norms. As a consequence, when the religiously committed person participates in the secular realm his motivation for action is religiously grounded. Whereas in the first instance religion tends to make for disengagement from the routine-ordering of society, in the second instance it tends to encourage re-engagement with it. Thus the same religion can support both the process of de-culturation (lifting the constraints from the culturally trapped individual) and the process of re-socialization (integrating the individual into the larger social environment).[3]

If Weber was right (and I believe he was), then one should be able to understand the effect of the religion of the poor (or any social group) as more than merely an escape from reality. Without denying the possibility or evidence that religion may at times function as an escape, what follows is an attempt to develop a theoretical perspective that would make it possible to understand and explain the positive psychological and organizational features associated with the religion of the poor. The basic assumption is that the religion of the poor can be understood as more than a lack of social organization, or as being merely pathological, neurotic or anomic in nature. The religious meaning systems that develop are more than rationalizations, more than neurotic responses, more than falsehoods and illusions, more than mere epiphenomena (Spiro, 1965:100-113; Maslow, 1964:44; Firth, 1959).

> Religious data have a mode of being that is peculiar to themselves; they exist on their own plane of reference, in their particular universe. The fact that this universe is not the physical universe of

> immediate experience does not imply their non-reality. . . . A religious datum reveals its deeper meaning when it is considered on its plane of reference, and not when it is reduced to one of its secondary aspects or its contexts. (Eliade, 1961:5f. Emphasis his.)

Religious symbols arise and are transmitted as much from a realistic perception of the world as from a false or neurotic one and have the potential to create a convincing model of reality and a blueprint for social behavior (Geertz, 1966:1-46).[4]

More specifically, it is argued in what follows that the religious patterns of the poor contribute in significant and positive ways to the processes of identity formation and to the development and maintenance of cultural values and norms. The analysis of how this occurs will proceed from an examination of two different levels of social structure - first, the level of the immediate social environment of the poverty community, and secondly, the relationship between the poverty community and the larger social environment.[5]

THE RELIGION OF THE POOR AND THE IMMEDIATE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

To the outsider looking in, the social patterns of the poverty community often appear to be disorganized. However, what appears to be social disorganization may be, in fact, a type of social organization different from that characteristic of the larger society (Gerlach & Hine, 1970:84; Whyte, 1943; Gans, 1962; Liebow, 1967; Hannerz, 1969). The local social structure and the expressive cultural style of the poor, viewed from the more immediate context, may be a very functional form of social organization. Social and cultural patterns are much more dynamic, and much more capable of forming structural alternatives than the middle-class bias of

the outsider often allows.

An example from my observations of religious behavior within a low-income white neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia (Lefever, 1971) will illustrate how what appears as social disorganization from the perspective of the larger society can be seen to have a clear structure of norms and role expectations when viewed from the perspective of the group.

The religious services observed were, for the most part, an improvised set of interactions, delicately woven together from the contributions of both the individual and the group. The typical service was both personal and corporate at the same time, with a taunt tension established between the two. Beyond a doubt, the group context was important; much of the action that occured in the services would not have taken place in private or in isolation. But in the final analysis, within the group context, it was the individual performance that really counted.

This individual-corporate dialectic was suddenly impressed upon me one Sunday evening as I was attending a service of about twenty assembled at one of the holiness churches. At the time when testimonies were called for, an old man, about seventy, stood up to testify. The others in the audience (mostly women) hardly turned to look at him. Instead they were whispering, and passing notes and papers between them. Once in a while a few nods of agreement were given, but the man was virtually ignored. The same thing happened when the minister was preaching. Twice a woman from the front row got up, walked to the piano, and put slips of paper into the prayer box. Others talked together and passed things back and forth.

The entire service was an alternating pattern of involvement and noninvolvement; of attentiveness and inattentiveness. And often the change from one side of the pattern to the other was very rapid. That is, those

who seemed inattentive or bored one minute would be giving a lively testimony or speaking in tongues the next minute.

To my usual way of reacting to such situations the inattentiveness of the audience seemed out of place, and, in fact, very rude. I expected people to turn their heads and at least pretend that they were listening to the person giving the testimony or to the preacher. To my way of looking at it, it would have been appropriate for the preacher to stop preaching until he had their attention. From the perspective of my middle-class expectations, the attentive-inattentive, involvement-noninvolvement sequence suggested disorganization and anarchy.

However, to describe the service as disorganized is to misunderstand the structure of the group. From their viewpoint it was not inattentiveness. They did not mind that several things were going on at the same time. It was expected that each individual should make his own contribution in the way that he himself chose. The ritual of public prayers was a good example of this, the way each individual prayed his prayer aloud at the same time. It was corporate--those praying gathered around the altar, but at the same time it was individual, as each offered a separate prayer. This in microcosm was how the entire service was structured.

The significance of this paradox of a highly individualized type of religious expression within the context of the group is stated well by Bruce Rosenberg.

> No doubt a great deal of the appeal of this kind of service is that it frees the minds of the audience from concern with what language, music, or story element is to come next, and so they are freer to involve themselves with the rhythm and the music and the emotion of the performance. Consequently, the audience

> is freer for active participation in the service, participation which is expressed in cries of joy, in clapping, in dancing, or whatever. Both the knowledge of the performance and the freedom to participate in it thus allows the congregation member to participate in the service and the sermon individually while he is expressing that individuality publicly; through his own singing, his own shouting, and his own clapping, the church member is to a certain degree creating his own service. Not only is he, by his active participation in the service, influencing the preacher in several ways, but he is creating a personal religious experience, and expressing it while the rest of the congregation are creating theirs (1970:105).

What goes on in the churches of the poor, then, is not disorganization so much as it is a particular kind of organization. It is a type of organization that has parallels to the jazz performance. Each person present is a potential player who takes his turn to improvise on the general theme of the meeting. Each performer adds his individual contribution at the time he picks up the cue. The improvisation could not take place apart from the group, but the group is secondary in importance to the individual. The congregation provides the context, but it is the quality of the individual contributions, from both preacher and audience, that makes the difference between an effective and ineffective service. A service with a group of religious virtuosos[6] can turn out to be a really lively time. Sometimes the substance of virtuosity is lacking, but the form is usually there.

An awareness of the dynamic and improvised nature of social organization in the poverty community also helps one to understand the processes

of identity formation among the poor. Persons from all status levels in society develop their identities to some extent out of the matrix of primary relationships, associated especially with family and peer-group structures. But, persons in the middle and upper status levels, in addition to the primary relationships they have with family and peers, also develop an intricate network of secondary and tertiary relationships. For persons of low-status level, however, significant secondary and tertiary relationships are relatively lacking. Or, in many instances, the ties they do have with secondary institutions (e.g., employer, policeman, welfare worker, landlord), only remind them of how powerless and dependent they are. Therefore, in order to get a more favorable evaluation of who they are, they turn to their relatives, friends, and peers who are close at hand, and with whom they interact on a face-to-face basis. The consequence of thir is that a heavy burden for identity formation is placed upon establishing meaningful primary relationships.

Rainwater (1970) in his study of the residents of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis writes about the expressive style of ghetto cultural life and its implications for identity formation.

> In the expressive life style instrumental orientations to living are consistently downgraded, recognized mainly in terms of the bare necessity of keeping body and soul together from day to day, while self-expression is emphasized, elaborated, and held out as possessing intrinsic merit (1970:378).

Associated with the expressive style is a particular type of personal identity which Rainwater elaborates with the aid of two metaphors--the stage and the marketplace. The metaphor of the stage suggests the idea

of the "dramatic self," the basic component of which is the constant search to maintain social reciprocity by mutual entertainment of each other. The metaphor of the marketplace suggests the idea of "the self-as-currency," or the way selves are symbolically exchanged.

> In their world, one learns that one has to "go for yourself," relying on the response of others to measure success. If one is successful in creating a dramatic self, a kind of security has been gained because that self can neither be taken away nor spent (at least in the short run). If one is successful in establishing relationships of symbolic reciprocity with others similarly seeking to maximize a dramatic self, then the self is constantly replenished (1970:379).

In the poverty community there are different contexts available where significant primary relationships can be developed. The most common contexts are the home and the street. But equally available to those who choose it is the context of the church. The public religious service provides an excellent setting for the poor to present themselves to each other. During the public religious service the self-identities of the members are enhanced as they symbolically exchange selves, and as they mutually entertain each other.

In the public religious service, interactions, for the most part, are not based on prescribed roles, or on formal, predetermined statuses. Instead, interactions are determined largely by individualized expressive styles. In order for the exchange of selves and the entertainment of each other to be successful, each individual present needs to learn to

express himself. The consequence of this is that the public religious service tends to be dramatic and demonstrative. In the context of the service, the religious participant learns that he has to "go for himself." He learns to present himself, and then to rely on the response of others to determine the meaning of his actions. The extent to which he is able to obtain a favorable response determines, to a large degree, the clarity with which his identity is established.

THE RELIGION OF THE POOR AND THE LARGER SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The focus on the norms that guide interaction in the more immediate environment of the poverty community is thus an important key to the understanding of the religious patterns of the poor. But the question of the relationship of the poor to the larger social environment still remains. And here, as is the case at the more immediate level, the relationship between religion and society is a dynamic one. On the one hand, religion is an adaptive mechanism that enables the poor and oppressed individuals and groups to find some spiritual compensation for the material and social benefits they are denied daily. They may not have much wealth, status, or power now, but they are redeemed in the eyes of their Lord and can look forward to an eternity in heaven. In other words, religion provides an alternative orientation that offers a more favorable self-judgment than that accorded them by the larger society.

But that is only one side of the relationship, the negative one. Unfortunately it is the side that is most often emphasized by scholar and layman alike. There is, however, another possible way to understand the relationship. That is, the religion of the poor, rather than merely providing an escape to some sweet bye and bye, can also be understood as

contributing in positive ways to social structuring and to the culture-building process. Two such contributions will be suggested.

First of all, the religion of the poor offers a challenge to the hierarchical structure of the general status system. Over against the status-bound social order, where individuals are related to one another on the basis of "more" or "less," an alternative of relative equality is offered. As Gary Schwartz has pointed out, a major function of religious ritual is to create "an experience of moral equality between men that is unencumbered by status considerations" (1970:84).

Victor Turner (1969) has studied in depth the social consequences of the ritual process. His research focused on African societies, but what he found there can be applied to an analysis of the religious rituals of the poor in this country. In fact, he suggests that such an application is possible.

Turner's point of departure is the "liminal phase" of the rites of passage as identified by Arnold van Gennep (1960). Van Gennep had shown that all rites of passage are marked by three phases: separation, margin, and aggregation. During the first phase the individual or group is detached from some earlier fixed point in the social structure, or from some set of cultural conditions. In the second phase, the "liminal" (limen, threshold in Latin), the characteristics of the ritual subject are ambiguous. He has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase the passage is completed. The ritual subject finds himself once again in a relatively stable niche in the social structure, with clearly defined rights and obligations vis-a-vis others in the society (Turner, 1969:94f).

It is the second phase, the liminal period, that is singled out by Turner for his analysis of the ritual process. The liminal phase is important because it is in the ambiguous condition of liminality that a major alternative to the hierarchical secular social structure is created. At this point of transition there arises a system of relationships that Turner terms "communitas." Communitas stands juxtaposed over against normal social structure. Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, at the edges of structure, or beneath structure. It is thus usually associated in some way with marginality and inferiority (1969:128).

> There are . . . two major "models" for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second, which emerges recognizable in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even commission of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (1969:96).

Communitas and structure are not polar opposites. Rather, they are related to each other in dialectical fashion. Both are basic components of the human experience. The opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable.

> Society . . . seems to be a process rather than a thing--a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and communitas. There would seem to be . . . a human "need" to

participate in both modalities. Persons starved on one in their functional day-to-day activities seek it in ritual liminality. The structurally inferior aspire to symbolic structural superiority in ritual; the structurally superior aspire to symbolic communitas and undergo penance to achieve it (1969:203).

To exaggerate one modality at the expense of the other results in negative consequences. To emphasize communitas without structure is sentimentality, and results in an incapability to maintain social and economic order over long periods of time (1969:203). On the other hand, to emphasize structure without communitas leads to despotism and overbureaucratization (1969:129).

In our society, the danger lies in the extreme of overbureaucratization. Highly differentiated roles and specialized division of labor, combined with technology and the computer, make communitas extremely difficult to attain. But some interstices of structure are left, and it is within these interstices that the significance of the religious rituals of the poor is to be found. From their position of weakness, the poor challenge the power of the strong. With their emphasis on status-equality, the divisions and the differentiations of the larger society are questioned. Their presence at the fringes of structure is a constant reminder of just has precarious and fabricated the hierarchical system of relationships really is. As the court jester in the royal court, the lowly of our society perform the role of poking fun at the pretentions of the mighty.

Turner, of course, applied his analysis to traditional societies.

But as Harvey Cox (1969) points out, the Feast of Fools performed a similar function in medieval Europe. The Feast of Fools was an annual festival which was celebrated with much revelry and satire. The priests donned bawdy masks and sang silly ditties, while minor clerics painted their faces and strutted around in the robes of their superiors. In general, mockery was made of the stately rituals of church and court. The importance of the festival from a sociological perspective is that "it exposed the arbitrary quality of social rank and enabled people to see that things need not always be as they are" (1969:5). By unmasking the pretense of the powerful their power, somehow, seemed less irresistible (1969:5).

The effect of the religion of the poor in contemporary American society, then, to some extent parallels that of the rituals of liminality in traditional societies and the Feast of Fools in medieval society. Clearly, the effect of the religion of the poor on American society is not as great as was the impact of the tribal rituals of liminality and the Feast of Fools on their respective societies. But for those who will take note, a similarity in function can be seen to exist.

This leads to the second contribution of the religion of the poor to the general culture-building process. And that is that the poor tend to emphasize certain values, which are a basic part of human experience, but which are often ignored by those who hold dominant positions of wealth, power, and prestige.

It would be a mistake, of course, to romanticize the life of the poor. But hopefully without doing so, the point can be made that it is often the "inferior" or "marginal" groups of a society who at times are representative of universal human values. Turner (1969:110), for example, reminds us that the good Samaritan in Jesus' parable, the Jewish fiddler in Chekhov's

"Rothschild's Fiddle," the Negro slave Jim in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, and Sonya, the prostitute in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, were all "inferior" or "marginal" persons in the societies they were a part of, and yet each represented a type of universal value. The same role is frequently played by "inferior" groups within a society, such as the Hebrews in the ancient Near East, the Irish in early medieval Christendom, the Swiss in modern Europe, and Blacks in America (Turner, 1969:109; Harding, 1969).[7]

The poor, because of the daily existential crises they face, have an understanding of tragedy and suffering that is frequently lacking from the sensibilities of the nonpoor. The poor, who are forced "to make do with string where rope is needed" (Miller, 1965:31), often have to face the consequences of having the string break. Hunger, unpaid bills, job layoffs, broken promises, insults and indignities from caretaker agencies, all are tightly woven in the daily fabric of the lives of the poor. And, of course, sickness and death. These latter two, although universal experiences, loom larger in importance for the poor than for others better off in the society. This is so because the poor, unlike the nonpoor, have to face them more directly and more immediately. There are fewer protective devices, such as insurance and preventive checkups, to shield them from the harshness of these experiences.

So, clearly, tragedy and suffering do have their impact upon the sensibilities of the poor. Their experiences of tragedy and suffering form a prism through which their view of the world is filtered. The possible consequence, of course, is that their view is distorted. As the light of their experiences passes through this prism it is deflected and what they think they see is not really the ways things are.

Thus, a world view based on tragedy and suffering can be illusionary and misleading. But equally illusionary and misleading is a world view that attempts to remove all elements of tragedy and suffering from human experience, such as some middle-class ideologies and some middle-class religions try to do. The high priest of the middle-class comforting cult is often referred to as Norman Vincent Peale (1952). The view of life that Peale and those of his theological ilk portray is one which is devoid of doubt, despair, temptation, and failure. All mystery and transcendence are removed from human experience, along with the sense of judgment and accountability. In their place they offer a one-dimensional model of man, in which everything is sweetness and light.[8]

One illusion, of course, is no better than another. An extreme tragic sense of life is equally suspect along with a view of life from which all sense of pathos has been removed. Both do injustice to a view of man that incorporates both his grandeur and misery.

But since our concern at the moment is with the contributions that the religion of the poor makes to the larger culture, it can be said that the tragic sense of life that is associated with the poor is a needed corrective for the over-optimistic view of man that is so prevalent in the dominant culture. On this point the religious poor join company with the small band of novelists, playwrights, and theologians who also recognize that human experience is suffused with tragedy and suffering.[9]

However, how does one reconcile the tragic view of life that is expressed by the religious poor with the fact that the religious services of the poor are also demonstrative and dramatic, that is, that humor and joy are a basic component of the worship experience? At first glance, this seems like a contradiction. Logically it would appear that life is either

passively endured or it is actively celebrated. If endured, the appropriate ritualistic mood would be somberness; if celebrated, the appropriate mood would be joyfulness. And yet the fact is that in the religious behavior of the poor both somberness and joyfulness are inextricably combined.

What appears at first to be a contradiction is really a paradox. And that is, that the ability to celebrate with abandon is most often found among those people who are no strangers to pain and oppression. Real celebration is not a retreat from the realities of injustice and evil, but occurs most authentically where these negative realities are recognized and confronted, not where they are avoided (Cox, 1969:25). To realize this makes for a better understanding of the sharp contrast that exists between the undemonstrative character of much of middle-class religion in America, and the demonstrative character of so much of lower-class religion. Adherents of middle-class religion find it difficult to develop religious expressions of worship in which they celebrate with real abandon because they are oblivious and immune to the depths of tragedy and suffering. In contrast, those who are forced daily to face the realities of poverty have developed forms of religious expression that are festive and dramatic precisely because they have known, at first hand, what it means to experience tragedy, suffering, injustice and evil.

CONCLUSION

This paper was an attempt to provide an alternative explanation of low-income religious behavior other than as a compensation for the oppressive and depressive conditions of lower-class life, or as an escape from those conditions. As a theoretical statement, hopefully the paper will provide a perspective for new interpretations of earlier studies of the religion of the poor or as a theoretical framework for future empirical studies.

In summary, the argument of this paper was that the religion of the poor contributes in significant and positive ways to the processes of identity formation and to the development and maintenance of cultural values and norms. The public religious service within the poverty community forms a stage, upon which, in dramatic fashion the identity-conferral and identity-seeking roles are dynamically played. The immediate social environment of the religious service is at the same time both a resource for the conferring of identities and the context in which new identities are forged.

With regards to the larger social environment, two contributions of the religion of the poor were discussed. First of all, it was suggested that the religious patterns of the poor offer a challenge to the hierarchical structure of the general status system. The religious poor, with their emphasis on status-equality, serve as a constant reminder to the larger society of just how precarious and fabricated the hierarchical status system really is. And, secondly, the religious poor offer an understanding of tragedy and suffering that is frequently lacking from the sensibilities of the religious nonpoor. The tragic sense of life associated with the religion of the poor is a needed corrective for the over-optimistic, one-dimensional view of man shared by the dominant culture, a view from which most elements of tragedy and suffering have been removed. In contrast to the majority of middle-class ideologies and middle-class religions, the religious poor offer a model of man which incorporates aspects of both his grandeur and misery, and a view of human experience in which both somberness and joyfulness are inextricably combined.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a review of the literature that is critical of the disorganization, malajustment theories see Hine (1969).
2. For discussions of a dynamic view of culture see Gans (1968:ch. 11); Hannerz (1969:ch. 9); and Valentine (1968:ch. 1).
3. Several recent empirical studies support the Weberian thesis regarding the paradoxical nature of religion. See Johnson (1961), G. Marx (1967), Robbins (1969), and Lebra (1970).
4. Geertz makes a distinction between "religious models of reality" and "religious models for reality."
5. I am indebted to Elizabeth Bott (1957) for an understanding of the importance of the distinction between the immediate and larger social environment.
6. Max Weber used the concept of the religious virtuoso to discuss a particular type of religious leader. I am applying it here to the entire congregation, both preacher and audience. For Weber's discussion, see Weber (1963:162-163).
7. Robert Blauner points out that the soul orientation so basic to Black culture can be looked at "as a philosophy of life or world view that places tragedy, suffering, and forbearance in a more central position than does the dominant American ethos" (1970:357).
8. For critiques of the religious views of Americans from which the tragic sense of life is absent, see Marty (1959:ch. 2) and Herberg (1960:ch. XI).

9. For example, novelists William Faulkner and Thornton Wilder, playwright Ingmar Bergman, and theologians Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr and James Cone. On their view of suffering and tragedy as well as in their expressive life style discussed above, the religious poor also share many similarities with the contemporary middle-class charismatic groups and the counterculture movement of the sixties. To elaborate on these similarities is not possible within the confines of this paper.

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